



McGill University Faculty of Religious Studies



Universität Zürich

THE AIM of the workshop is to examine the unique contribution of the great Florentine reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562) to the emerging hermeneutics of Early Modern Europe, where Renaissance and Reformation engaged classical theories of interpretation derived from Patristic and Scholastic sources with new methods drawn from Humanism and Hebraism. Vermigli's biblical commentaries provide an extraordinarily rich mine for the confluence of Scholasticism, Humanism and Hebraism. An Italian Reformer whose distinguished career in the Catholic Church in Italy (until 1542) was followed by one equally distinguished in Protestant Europe, teaching successively in Strasbourg, Oxford, and finally in Zurich, Vermigli was one of the pioneers of the sixteenth century in acknowledging the work of medieval Rabbis, just then becoming available through the Bomberg Bible (1517). During his lengthy training as an Augustinian canon Vermigli acquired significant tools—the three “biblical languages” of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, a thorough grounding in classical, patristic and medieval literature, as well as in Aristotle as taught in the University of Padua which he attended for eight years. Thus Vermigli developed a unique hermeneutical method, faithful to the original texts but spiced with *loci/topica* on a wide range of subjects relevant to controversies of the time. These latter were gathered in 1576 by Robert Masson, a disciple in the French Church in London, into the four-volume *Loci Communes*, destined to become, together with Heinrich Bullinger's *Decades* and John Calvin's *Institutes*, the most influential summary of Christian doctrine in early Reformed Protestantism.

Peter Martyr Vermigli was a reasonable and reasoning partisan of the Protestant cause in the sixteenth century, when reason too often gave way to mere polemic. He wrote major works on the eucharist and celibacy, and his lectures on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* were posthumously published. For the most part, however, he earned his living by lecturing on the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Most biblical commentators are assigned to one “school” or another within the history of interpretation. Very few can be said to lay claim to being genuinely unique; Vermigli is one of those. This means that he can be studied both for his own sake as well as for the substantive impact he made on subsequent exegesis and interpretation.

Vermigli's scriptural lectures and commentaries present special problems. First, most of these lectures were never revised for publication by Vermigli himself, and these unedited works tend to be in a rather

condensed form. Secondly, Vermigli's erudition is intimidating. He was a fine classicist; he learned to read Greek in order to read Aristotle in the original but also came to know Homer well enough that he quoted the Greek epic "at the least provocation." As a holder of a doctorate in Thomist theology, Vermigli is constantly bringing into Protestant discourse parts of Aquinas' vast system of thought. Vermigli also read fluently both biblical Hebrew, and the medieval Hebrew of the Jewish commentators, and the Aramaic of the Targums on the Hebrew Bible; he freely incorporated these Jewish sources into his commentary. Furthermore, Vermigli read and utilized the Protestant sources that were then available to him. Yet this very difficulty of his immense erudition gives Vermigli's commentary its actuality. Vermigli stands at the juncture of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish thought, and many of the questions with which he wrestled still exercise us today.

Our workshop, therefore, seeks to bring together a group of scholars who can collectively undertake to shed light upon the chief points in the growth and development of Vermigli's unique hermeneutics, that is 1) from the standpoint of his varied international career, 2) by examining the patterns of exegesis in his principal biblical commentaries, and finally 3) by considering the application of his hermeneutical method to the formulation of theological argumentation. By concentrating principally on his approach to biblical exegesis our aim is to explore a fascinating chapter in the history of early-modern hermeneutical theory with a view to revising and correcting some common misconceptions. These include the supposed "literalism" of the Reformers' hermeneutics, the nature of relations between continental and English Reform movements, and the ways in which Vermigli and his contemporaries turned a corner with their amended exegetical practices to make way for (rather than to delay, as Descartes thought) the Enlightenment and modernity.

Vermigli's significance in the history of hermeneutics is threefold. First, it is evident that he arrived from Catholic Italy with impressive credentials as a biblical interpreter, including mastery of the three "biblical languages" (Hebrew, Greek and Latin). This helps us to understand better the phenomenon known as the "Italian Evangelism" of the *spirituali*. Leonardo de Chirico will address Vermigli's early intellectual formation in the religious and intellectual ferment of Italy prior to his departure northward in 1542. His first Strasbourg period (1542-47), whose lecture series survive only in the Lamentations and Genesis commentaries, provides crucial insight into the formation of Vermigli's exegetical method through his contact with Martin Bucer, and will be addressed by Professors Noblesse-Rocher and Hobbs. Secondly, Vermigli's skill in Hebrew and Aramaic led him to employ the recent Bomberg Bible (1517) which printed medieval Rabbinical commentaries surrounding the Hebrew and Aramaic texts on each page. He was a pioneer in the new development of "Hebraism," not only through a return to the original language of the Hebrew scriptures, but to the significant body of interpretation by their rabbinical interpreters, a mine for scholars left largely untapped hitherto. They were distinctive in promoting philological exegesis as alternative to the traditional fourfold method inherited from the Patristic era (i.e. literal, moral, allegorical, anagogical). Vermigli's Hebraism will be addressed in particular by Emidio Campi and Daniel Shute. Thirdly, Vermigli moved away consciously from the fanciful, often allegorical, exegesis of the Middle Ages, towards the newer, more philological methods of interpretation developed by Erasmus and the Renaissance humanists. This meant seeking the most correct texts available from which to extract the original meaning. Taken together, these elements in Vermigli's method signalled a return to a tradition dating back to Jerome's sort of Hebraism, and overcoming the contrived and arbitrary sort of exegesis then prevalent. David Wright and Max Engammare will take up aspects of the methodology of humanism and the revival of Patristic exegetical practice.

Some key questions to be addressed during the workshop will include: why is Vermigli perceived as a crucial figure in sixteenth-century attempts at reconciling the tensions between humanism and scholasticism? Why was the Zurich school so influential both on the continent (e.g. Heidelberg theology) and in England (through Bullinger, Jewel, the Zurich student circle in Oxford)? Why were Vermigli's hermeneutics and the Zurich theology generally so successful in the early-modern English,

continental, and American universities and seminaries? Responses to these questions will have a significant impact on early-modern studies. Charlotte Methuen, Michael Baumann, and Luca Baschera will take up various aspects of these questions. Frank James and Jason Zuidema will offer an account of the patterns of exegesis in specific biblical commentaries, while Selderhuis, Klempa, Kingdon, Opitz and Kirby will address Vermigli's formulation of certain prominent theological *loci* from the standpoint of their hermeneutical presuppositions. Patrick Donnelly has offered to explore the hermeneutics as applied within the rhetorical contexts of prayers and sermons, while Christian Moser will do the same for the epistolary. Joseph McLelland, whose doctoral study of Vermigli's thought published in 1957 played an important role in the modern revival of interest in the Florentine reformer, will take on the task of summing up the scope of his subsequent influence.

